

Marching to Freedom

Author: Subhadra Sen Gupta
Illustrator: Tapas Guha

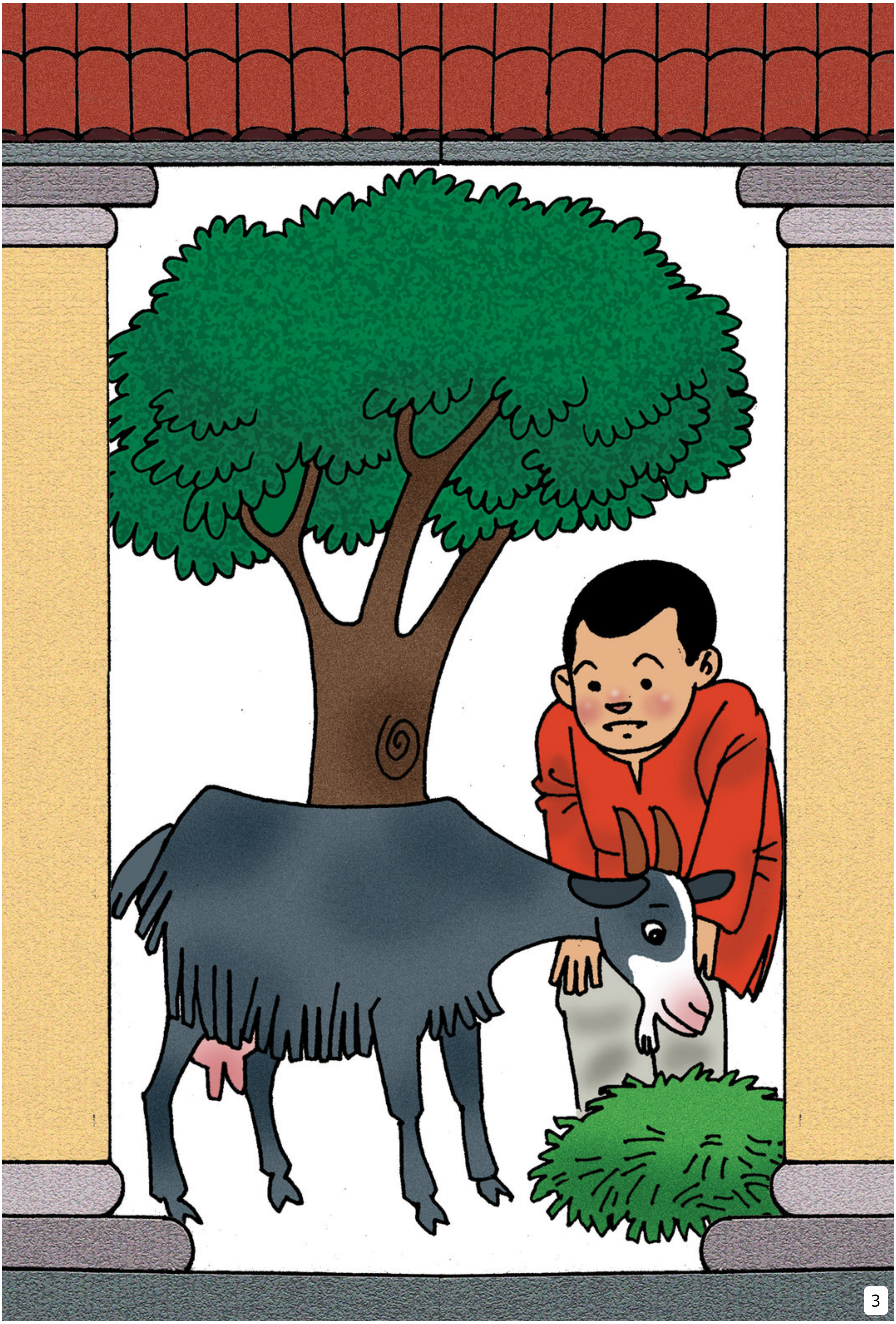
PRATHAM BOOKS
A Book in Every Child's Hand

Level 4

Dhani knew something exciting was being planned at the ashram, but no one would tell him anything. “Just because I’m nine years old,” thought Dhani glumly. “I’m sure they think I’m stupid. I am not!”

Dhani and his parents lived in a very special place. It was Mahatma Gandhi’s Sabarmati Ashram near Ahmedabad where people from all over India came to stay. Like Gandhiji, they were all fighting for India’s freedom. During their stay at the ashram, they spent their time spinning khadi thread on charkhas, singing bhajans and listening to Gandhiji’s lectures.

At Sabarmati, everyone had to work – cook and clean, wash clothes, fetch water from the well, milk the cows and goats, and grow vegetables. Even Dhani had a job – he had to take care of Binni, one of the ashram’s goats. He quite enjoyed that because Binni was his best friend and he liked talking to her.



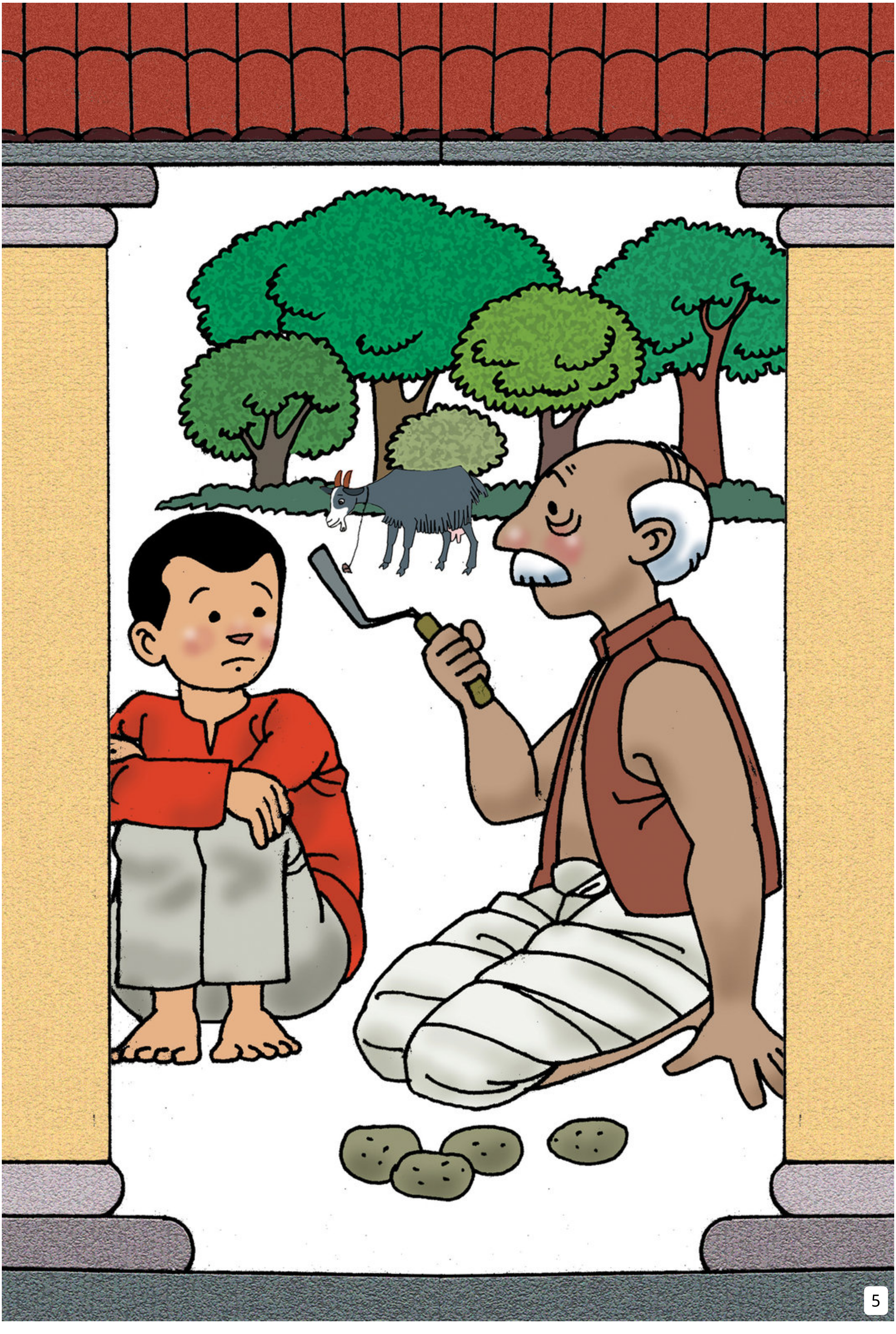
That morning, as Dhani fed Binni with fresh grass and changed the water in her bowl, he said, “Something’s up, Binni! They all sit and talk in Gandhiji’s room. They are planning something. I know it!”

Binni chewed and nodded as if she understood.
Dhani felt hungry. He headed towards the kitchen, with Binni skipping along beside him. His mother was fanning the chulha, filling up the room with smoke.

“Amma, is Gandhiji going somewhere?” he asked. His mother coughed in the smoke and said, “They are going on a march.”
“March? Where are they going?” Dhani queried.

“Somewhere near the sea. Now stop asking questions and go away Dhani!” his mother said impatiently. “Let me finish the cooking first.”

Dhani wandered off to the vegetable garden where old Binda was digging up potatoes.



“Binda chacha,” Dhani sat beside him, “are you going on the march too?”

Binda shook his head. Before he could say anything, Dhani eagerly asked, “Who is marching? Where are they going? What is happening?”

Binda stopped digging and said, “I’ll answer all your questions, but first tie up that troublesome goat. She’s chewing up my spinach.”

Dhani dragged Binni away and tied her to the lemon tree nearby. Then Binda told him about the march. Gandhiji and some of the men from the ashram were going to walk through Gujarat to reach the sea at a place called Dandi. They would walk through villages and towns for a whole month. Once they reached Dandi, they would make salt.

“Salt?” Dhani sat up and frowned. “Why will they make salt? You can buy it in every shop!”

“I know,” Binda laughed. “But Mahatmaji has a plan. You know he always marches to protest against something, right?”

“Of course I know. He leads the Satyagraha marches to fight the British government and win freedom for India. But why is he protesting about salt? It’s silly!”

“It’s not silly at all, Dhani! Do you know we all have to pay a tax on salt?”

“So what?”

“Everyone needs salt... that means, every Indian, even the poorest, has to pay this tax,” explained Binda chacha.

“That is really unfair!” Dhani’s eyes were hot with anger.

“Of course it’s unfair. Not only that, Indians are not allowed to make any salt either. Mahatmaji has asked the British to stop the tax, but they have refused. So he has decided to walk to Dandi and make salt from seawater.”

“Walking for a month!” Dhani brooded worriedly. “Gandhiji will get really tired. Why don’t they take a bus or train to Dandi instead?”

“Because, if he goes on this long march and walks all the way to Dandi, the news will spread. There will be pictures in the papers and reports on the radio, and people all over the world will know that we are fighting for our freedom. And that will really embarrass the British.”

“Gandhiji is clever, isn’t he?” Dhani’s eyes were shining. “Ah, that he is!” Binda’s eyes crinkled with laughter. “He’s even written to the Viceroy and told him what he plans to do! The British have no idea what they are in for!”

Later in the morning, Dhani wandered up to the hut where Gandhiji was staying and peered in through a window. Inside, many of the ashram people were talking to Gandhiji. Dhani heard them planning the route along which they would walk to Dandi. He was thrilled to see his father sitting among the people.

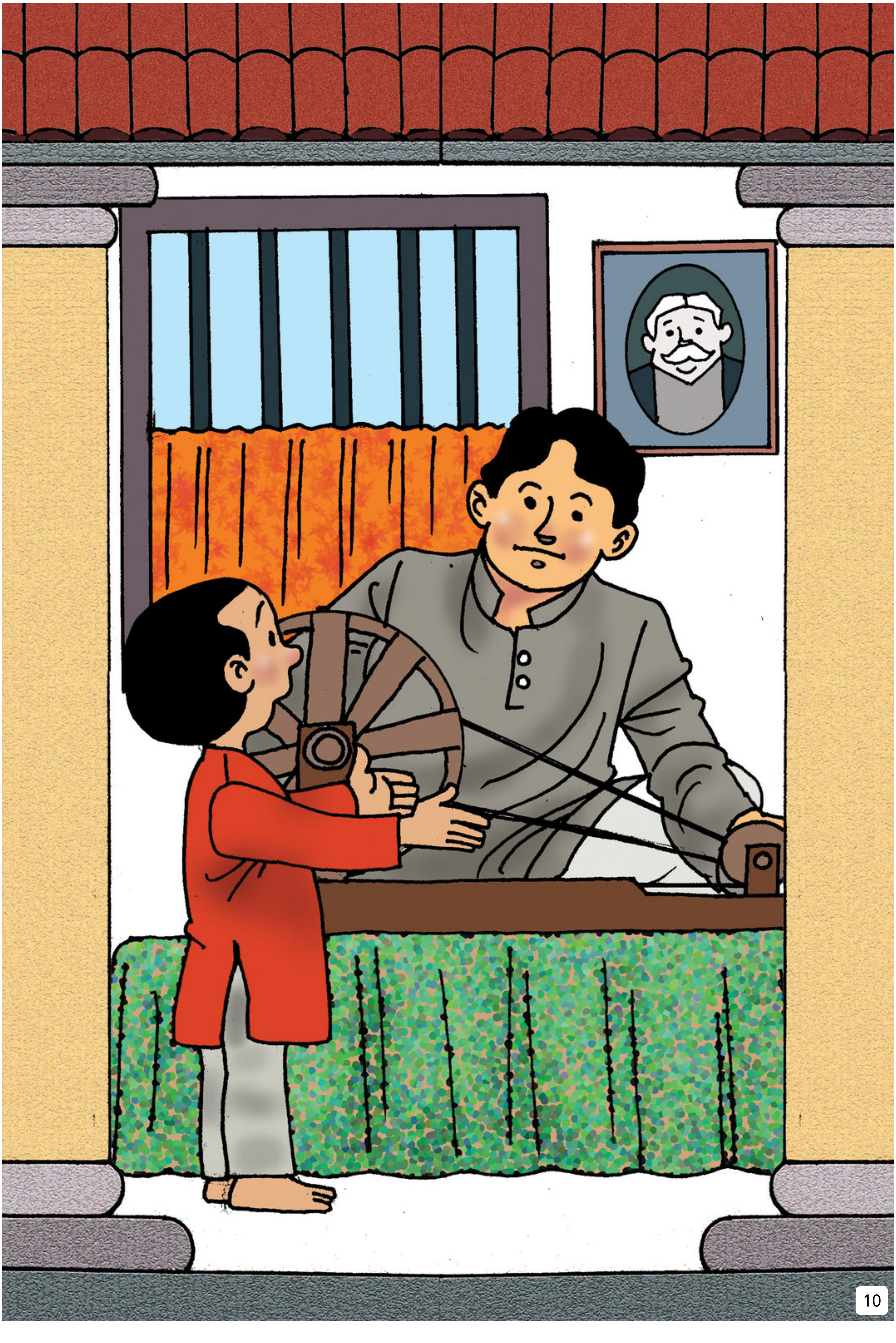
In the afternoon, when the ashram was quiet, Dhani went looking for his father. He found him under a tree, spinning on his charkha.

“Pitaji, are you and Amma going on the march to Dandi?” Dhani got straight to the point.

“I am going. You and Amma will stay here.”

“I am coming with you.”

“Don’t be silly, Dhani. You can’t walk so much. Only the ashram’s young men will go.”



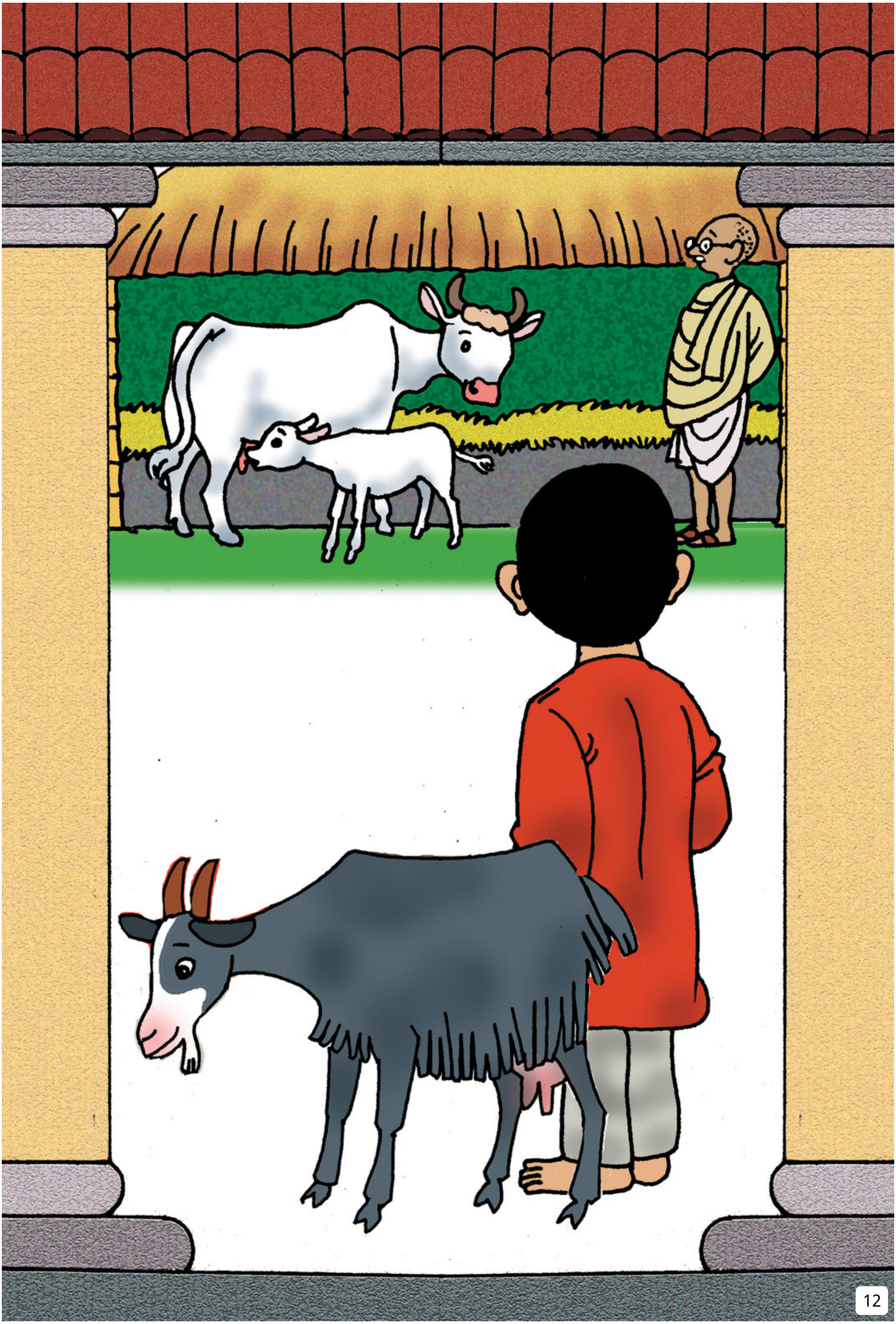
"I'm nine and I can run faster than you can!" Dhani replied stubbornly. "You can't stop me from coming with you."

His father stopped spinning and explained patiently, "Only the people who have been chosen by Mahatmaji will go."

"Fine! I'll talk to him then! I'm sure he'll say yes," said Dhani and marched off.

Gandhiji was a very busy man and it was not easy to catch him alone. But Dhani knew exactly when he would have the time to listen – early every morning when he went for a walk around the ashram.

The next morning, as the sun came up, Dhani slipped out of bed and went looking for Gandhiji. He found him in the cowshed checking on all the cows. Then he strolled into the vegetable garden to inspect the peas and cabbage and have a chat with Binda.



All the while, Dhani and Binni followed him.

Finally, Gandhiji headed back to his hut. He sat down beside his charkha in the verandah and called out to Dhani, “Come here, child!” Dhani ran up, with Binni skipping along.

“What’s your name beta?”

“Dhani, Gandhiji.”

“And this is your goat?”

“Yes, Gandhiji! This is my friend Binni, who gives the milk you drink every morning.” Dhani smiled proudly and said, “I take care of her.”

“Good!” Gandhiji leaned forward. “Now Dhani, tell me why you and Binni have been following
me everywhere this morning?”

“I wanted to ask you something,” Dhani began nervously. “Can I come with you to Dandi?”

Gandhiji smiled, “You are too small, beta. Dandi is 385 kilometres away and only young men like your father will be able to walk with me.”

“But you are not young!” Dhani said. “Won’t you feel tired?”

“I am a very good walker,” Gandhiji replied.

“I am a good walker too.” Dhani was adamant.

“Ah yes,” Gandhiji looked thoughtful. “But there is a problem. If you go with me, who will take care of Binni? After walking for so long, I will become weak. When I come back, I’ll need to drink lots of milk to become strong again.”



“Hmm, you’re right, Gandhiji. Binni eats only when I feed her.” Dhani lovingly stroked Binni’s head, “And only I know what she likes to eat.”

“Exactly! So will you stay in the ashram and take care of Binni for me?”

"Yes, Gandhiji, I will,” said Dhani. “And Binni and I will be waiting for you.”

Fun facts of History

1. In March 1930, Mahatma Gandhi led the march to Dandi to protest against the tax on salt imposed by the British. Gandhi and his followers walked through Gujarat for 24 days. All along the way, they were welcomed with flowers and songs. Newspapers across the world carried reports about the march.

2. At Dandi, Gandhi and his followers collected salt from the seashore and were arrested. The arrest sparked off the Non-cooperation Movement, and people all over India boycotted schools, colleges and offices.

3. There were 78 volunteers who accompanied Gandhi on the march. They covered a distance of 385 kilometres.

4. The march began on 12 March and ended on 5 April 1930. The youngest marcher was 16 years old.

5. The year 2005 marks the 75th anniversary of the Dandi March.



VOL. XVIII NO. 62.— BOMBAY THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 1930. PRICE ONE ANNA

GREAT MARCH FOR LIBERTY BEGINS.

Mahatma Starts With His Chosen Band Of 78.

RUMOURS OF IMPENDING ARREST BELIED.

Ashram Besieged By Eager Crowds:

SOUL-STIRRING SCENES ON BIDDING FAREWELL.

1,000 WOMEN PARTICIPATE IN HUGE PROCESSION.

CONGRESS FLAG HOISTED IN JAPAN.

FIRST STEP TOWARDS SWARAJ

Gandhiji Addresses Aslali Villagers.

LABOUR GOVT. CAN'T PLAY TORY GAME.'

"Daily Herald" Quotes Burke On "Great Empire & Little Minds"

"NO REPRESSIVE POLICY IN INDIA"







Story Attribution:

This story: Marching to Freedom is written by Subhadra Sen Gupta . © Pratham Books , 2005. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license.

Other Credits:

This book has been published on StoryWeaver by Pratham Books. Pratham Books is a not-for-profit organization that publishes books in multiple Indian languages to promote reading among children. www.prathambooks.org

Illustration Attributions:

Cover page: Gandhi and a boy, by Tapas Guha © Pratham Books, 2005. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 3: Boy watching a goat graze, by Tapas Guha © Pratham Books, 2005. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 5: Boy and old man with a spade, by Tapas Guha © Pratham Books, 2005. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 10: Boy watching man spin a charkha, by Tapas Guha © Pratham Books, 2005. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 12: Boy standing next to a Goat and Gandhi watching a cow and calf, by Tapas Guha © Pratham Books, 2005. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 15: Gandhi and a boy, by Tapas Guha © Pratham Books, 2005. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license. Page 18: Collage on the Dandi March, by Tapas Guha © Pratham Books, 2005. Some rights reserved. Released under CC BY 4.0 license.

Marching to Freedom
(English)

Mahatma Gandhi and his followers have decided to march to Dandi to protest against the unfair salt tax imposed by the British. 9-year-old Dhani who lives at the Sabarmati Ashram wants to go too. This tale captures the spirit behind the momentous event that inspired millions of Indians to join the struggle for Independence.

This is a Level 4 book for children who can read fluently and with confidence.

PRATHAM BOOKS storyweaver

Pratham Books goes digital to weave a whole new chapter in the realm of multilingual children's stories. Knitting together children, authors, illustrators and publishers. Folding in teachers, and translators. To create a rich fabric of openly licensed multilingual stories for the children of India and the world. Our unique online platform, StoryWeaver, is a playground where children, parents, teachers and librarians can get creative. Come, start weaving today, and help us get a book in every child's hand!